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Gender Sensitizing Parliaments: Reflections on Becoming a Feminist Academic Critical Actor

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Abstract

Informed by my secondment to the UK Parliament in 2015–2016, and the production and reception of *The Good Parliament* report—which offered a blueprint for a diversity-sensitive House of Commons—this article reflects on my experiences becoming a feminist academic critical actor. This new type of critical actor extends the conceptualization first developed by Childs and Krook (2006, 2008). A distinctiveness vis. Chappell and Mackay's (2021) concept of the "feminist critical friend" is also drawn: In addition to researching institutional change and supporting others in their reform work, the feminist academic critical actor is essential to instigate and institute institutional change. In this, the feminist academic critical actor is engaged in quotidian persuasion work and is both the agent as well as the analyst of research, critically reflecting on the dynamics and actors of institutional status, change, and resistance, including their own acts, in situ and after. In making the case for the feminist academic critical actor, the academic is recognized as doing something different, begging important questions of responsibility and accountability, and the opportunities and costs of engaging in such acts, particularly for minoritized and/or precarious academics. In the latter part of the article, I sketch out some of the dilemmas located in the questioning of my authority and legitimacy, and concerning the harm that I faced as a relatively privileged aspirant feminist academic critical actor, acting to rework the highly masculinized institution that is the UK House of Commons.

Keywords

critical actor; feminist academic critical actor; feminist institutionalism; gender-sensitive parliaments; House of Commons

1. Introduction

In 2015, having been involved behind the scenes working towards the successful establishment of a Women and Equalities Committee (Childs, 2022), I invited myself into the UK House of Commons. I inhabited the House from September of that year until February, drafting a 40,000-word report. *The Good Parliament* (TGP) made 43 top-line recommendations that, if all implemented, the report claimed, would overturn the Commons diversity insensitivities and transform the House into a more representative, inclusive, and effective institution. Delayed by the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, TGP was formally launched by the then Speaker, the Rt Hon John Bercow, in July 2016. After the summer parliamentary recess, the Speaker established a new parliamentary body, the Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion (hereafter the Reference Group) to lead on TGP's agenda—a recommendation that he had accepted prior to publication, and was hence not included in the report itself. Chaired by the Speaker, and comprised of women and men MPs from across the House, the Reference Group benefitted symbolically and substantively from Bercow's leadership and Office resources. I was appointed its adviser. The Reference Group met regularly while the House was sitting for the next two years, until autumn 2018.

At the time of my arrival in the Commons, I was already aware the of gender-sensitive parliament (GSP) publications of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2011, 2012). Their large, colourful map documenting the percentages of women parliamentarians across the globe had been a staple on my office wall for years. I was confident too, as I sought funding for my parliamentary secondment, that the IPU's global reputation would enhance efforts to effect gender-sensitizing reforms. The UK Parliament is one of its 180 institutional members, with IPU staff based on the Parliamentary Estate working closely with MPs. As the list below details, the IPU's GSP framework has seven dimensions (IPU, n.d.):

1. Promotes and achieves equality in numbers of women and men across all its bodies and internal structures.
2. Develops a gender equality policy framework suited to its own national parliamentary context.
3. Mainstreams gender equality throughout all its work (via gender mainstreaming and or via a women's caucus or gender equality committee, to ensure that parliamentary outputs are analyzed from a gender perspective).
4. Fosters an internal culture that respects women's rights, promotes gender equality, and responds to the needs and realities of MPs—men and women—to balance work and family responsibilities.
5. Acknowledges and builds on the contributions made by its male members who pursue and advocate for gender equality.
6. Encourages political parties to take a proactive role in the promotion and achievements of gender equality.
7. Equips its parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality, actively encourages the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions, and ensures that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary administration.

I would quickly narrow these down to three: (a) equality of participation; (b) parliamentary infrastructure; and (c) Commons culture. Reasons of resources and expertise meant I would neither address the administrative side of the House in any meaningful fashion, and for reasons of resources once again, but also because it is the

government rather than the legislature that leads on these, nor would I attend to the quality of the Commons' outputs—laws and policies—from a gender equality perspective.

In another revision from the IPU's framework, I adopted a diversity-sensitive parliament (DSP) approach, rather than a GSP one. In TGP I defended this move in the following way, stressing the importance of working intersectionally: "Women are not the only group under-represented in politics and Parliament…these other exclusions should also be acknowledged and rectified" (Childs, 2016; see also Childs & Palmieri, 2023, 2020). I did not document that my decision was triggered by the hostility I faced when I first presented the GSP "terms" of my secondment to the House of Commons Commission. The Commission is the Commons' body formally tasked with institutional leadership (https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/348/house-of-commons-commission). In a meeting where all but the two lay members were men, I witnessed what I came to call the "hear gender, see women, think discrimination against men and special treatment for women" critique. In short, having listened to my presentation, the goal of gender-sensitizing the House was seemingly perceived to threaten these men MPs' preferences and interests. I left the room highly concerned that Commission MPs—and their fellow travellers—would be unsympathetic if not openly antagonistic to my report's recommendations.

Jumping forward a couple of years, a review undertaken as part of the UK university "research excellence" assessment established that more than 40 percent of TGP's recommendations had since been implemented in part or in full. Although this is only a snapshot of top-line effects, Table 1 details that implemented reforms included new formal rules (e.g., a new Standing Order established "proxy voting" for MPs on baby leave, under maternity/paternity leave recommendation no. 12), the establishment of new institutions (the Women and Equalities Committee was made permanent and the Reference Group was established), and interventions engendering cultural change (e.g., the publication of data regarding committee witness diversity). This magnitude of impact was unexpected. I had, to be sure, in TGP talked up the period 2016–2018 as particularly "felicitous" for GSP/DSP reform, but in so speaking, I was in large measure seeking to construct the contemporary moment in that way. In specifying any effects TGP might have, more substantively speaking, I was if anything rather circumspect. As presented to my university, my "impact claims" were three-fold: (a) to more fully *document* key gender insensitive parliamentary practices, structures, and norms; (b) to *develop a reform agenda*—a set of implementable proposals to redress these; and (c) to *instigate a process* that will ultimately lead to the achievement of a "gender-sensitive" parliament at Westminster. TGP's impact achievement plan was, accordingly and explicitly oriented to "creating and developing relationships, networks, processes, and strategies for reform," rather than quantifying substantive outputs (Childs, 2016; Lovenduski, 2017).

2. The Feminist Academic Critical Actor

Originally, the concept of critical actor refers to elected representatives:

> Who initiate policy proposals on their own and who often—but not necessarily—embolden others to take steps *to promote policies for women*, regardless of the number of female representatives present in a particular institution. (Childs & Krook, 2008, p. 734, emphasis added).

Table 1. TGP's implemented recommendations.

Parliamentary actor	DSP dimension	Total no.	TGP recommendation (numbered)
The Speaker	Culture	4	#1 (behaviour concord) #3 (children/lobbies) #5 (IPU GSP audit) infant feeding (not numbered)
Reference Group	Participation; infrastructure; culture	5	#6 (MPs' work) #12 (maternity/paternity leave) #13 (creche) #14 (DSC witness diversity) #16 (dress code)
The Commission	Participation; culture	4	#17 (acknowledgement of the Reference Group by the Commission) #18 (website) #19 (introduction to being an MP programme) #20 (double-sided Parliamentary pass)
Leader of the House	Infrastructure	1	#25 (establishment of the Women and Equalities Committee)
Liaison Committee	Infrastructure/culture	1	#28 (DSC diversity data)
Procedure Committee	Infrastructure/culture	1	#29 (DSP nomenclature)
Works of Art Committee	Infrastructure/culture	2	#40 (10-Year Dead artwork rule) #41 (diverse artwork)

Note: DSC stands for Departmental Select Committee.

The advancement of the concept of critical actor reflected mine and Mona Lena Krook's criticism of the widely circulating theory of critical mass, or what we would term "critical mass theory." In this, women-elected representatives are presented as the agents of feminist change, or rather they become so when they reach a particular percentage, usually taken to be 30 percent. Crudely, and problematically, such accounts abstract women representatives from their wider, local contexts, and render them "all of a kind" who, at the magic number, work together unfettered to successfully realize shared feminist ends. The new concept of critical actors took inspiration from Dahlerup's (1988) discussion of critical acts and holds that regardless of the number or percentage of women in a parliament, some elected representatives—probably but not necessarily women—seek to act for women because they have a lower threshold. Whilst it is true that the language of new and/or feminist institutionalism was not drawn upon as we defined the concept, attention was never merely on what the individual critical actor does, inattentive to analytic considerations of her context, or indeed those that she may work with (see Chappell & Mackay, 2017, p. 34; Childs, 2024; Palmieri, 2019). Contra those who regard the critical actor concept as over-privileging individual agency (Annesley & Gains, 2010; Rai & Spary, 2019; Waylen, 2017), our conceptualization challenges such assumptions inherent within critical mass theory. The emphasis in our definition on critical actors' motivation, their initiating role, and women-friendly goals, coupled with the qualification that their effects are neither guaranteed nor unidirectional but rather mediated and contextualized, and at times contested and resisted, undergirds the qualification that the "shape and impact" of critical actors' acts are "not absolute" (Childs & Krook, 2006).

It was only as I spent more time in the UK House of Commons identifying its GSP/DSP insensitivities that I began to think of myself as *becoming* some kind of critical actor. Like other researchers, whether political

science or anthropological (Crewe, 2005, 2015; Geddes, 2020; Malley, 2011; Miller, 2021), I was present to document and better understand its ways of working. But I was also present—and was explicitly funded—to design and deliver quantifiable change. Extending the concept of critical actors beyond elected representatives is by no means unprecedented—politics and gender as well as policy scholars have long identified change actors operating outwith parliaments. Going by different names, including but not limited to policy entrepreneurs, these actors from civil society and academia collaborate with politicians and civil servants to bring about feminist change (see, for example, Freedman, 2017; Holli, 2008; Mackay, 2008; Sawer, 2016; Woodward, 2004). That said, proposing the concept of the feminist academic critical actor might be considered more demanding, begging many questions, inter alia: What does the feminist academic have to do and/or achieve to be considered a feminist academic critical actor? How are they different from other academics who have long since supported political party activists, women members of parliaments, and femocrats? (Chappell & Mackay, 2021; Childs & Dahlerup, 2018; Skjeie et al., 2017). What is—or should be—their relationship with others within the political institution, women's civil society outside, and the wider feminist academic community?

In the first instance, the feminist academic critical actor shares with other researchers involved in engagement and impact activities, acceptance of the feminist imperative to change as well as study the world; they similarly eschew claims that social science should or can be objective (Campbell & Childs, 2013; Stoker, 2013); and they produce new research oriented towards and/or supportive of change. Like the original critical actor, the feminist academic one need not be a woman. In advancing the new concept, I also happily place the feminist academic critical actor against the backdrop of the category of "feminist critical friend" (FCF), presented by Chappell and Mackay (2021). The FCF is derived from the study of *feminist advocates* within various institutions *by scholars* "interested in understanding where and when particular strategies" for change succeed (Chappell & Mackay, 2021, p. 2, emphasis added); they are "engaged" with, and "entangled" in, the work of an organization's feminist advocates' change efforts (Chappell & Mackay, 2021). Most similar to Chappell and Mackay's (2021) gender expert/advocate who is "embedded in institutional arenas for a period of time to *actively and explicitly promote* reform agendas" (p. 5, emphasis added), the feminist academic critical actor is at times importantly quite different. There is, I posit, too much about their "change" work that cannot be contained by the verb "to promote," which is constitutive of their gender expert/advocate definition:

> I read Chappell and Mackay's use of the forward slash linking gender expertise and advocacy as limiting the FCF's role as a change actor. This is not just about how much advocacy work the gender expert/advocate does. If the FCF is critical for Chappell and Mackay in the sense of offering a critique of the institutional arena within which insiders seek to act, and of the masculinized formal and informal institutions therein, the feminist academic critical actor is (at least potentially) critical in the sense of being *essential to driving and at times leading institutional change*. (Childs, 2024)

In other words, the feminist academic critical actor not only acts directly within a political arena, they *instigate*—"'bring about' changes" by incitement or persuasion"(Instigate, n.d.)—and *institute*—"set up, establish…introduce" (Institute, n.d.)—feminist change. Thus, even as she researches what is going on and as she supports others, oftentimes working in close collaboration with them, the feminist academic critical actor is also devising and driving reforms. To be clear, I am not proposing the feminist academic critical actor as some kind of heroic lone wolf(ess). Holding that the feminist academic critical actor at time leads on

institutional change is not the same thing as saying that they have—or must—act alone. Nor then, am I downplaying the collective knowledge she brings with her, and the others (individuals and networks) with whom she works, whether academic, GSP international organization, civil society, and/or parliamentary actors. And, of course, whether any individual merits the status of the feminist academic critical actor (rather than an aspirant one) can only be answered by empirically documenting how they acted to rework an organization or political arena. In their own account, it is important that the feminist academic critical actor verifies what they did and with happened as a consequence of their acts thereafter (see Childs, 2024; Erikson, 2017, p. 8).

The labour of the feminist academic critical actor is two-fold: (a) to produce new research and (b) undertake persuasion work. New research is inevitable: How else will the feminist academic critical actor identify a parliament's gender/diversity insensitivities and determine the necessary and appropriate reforms? But even when engaged in thinking about a new design, the feminist academic critical actor is attentive to the associated building work or, more modestly, the institutional refashioning that will be needed (Celis & Childs, 2020) making the parliament do what it would otherwise not have done (Ahmed, 2012). In both aspects, the feminist academic critical actor's twin pre-fixes are constitutive not merely descriptive.

The feminist academic critical actor's prior research expertise positions them to better read their parliament. Adopting an ethnographic approach enables them to better interpret "what happens, by and to whom, and with what effects" (Childs, 2024). Deploying new institutionally grounded knowledge, more and different parts of the parliament's rules, norms, and practices—and how they relate to and interact with each other—as well as embedded encounters with others, become visible and thereby interpretable, and thus (potentially) fertile for gender-sensitive transformation. In her quotidian persuasion work, the feminist academic critical actor sets out to exploit (proto)opportunities within the parliament by working with those who are themselves seeking gender-sensitive parliamentary change and those who may not be so predisposed but who nonetheless occupy positions of power from which change can be enacted. In all this, the feminist academic critical actor embraces Feminist Institutionalism's insights regarding the "limitations" of what she can achieve, and the likely "compromises" needed (Chappell, 2006; Mackay, 2021, p. 77). There will undoubtedly be some feminist "red lines" that they cannot cross, but accepting incremental, micro-level change against the macro and meso backdrop (Chappell & Mackay, 2021, p. 17; Mackay et al., 2010, p. 582), helps reconcile the feminist academic critical actor to the *feminist art of the possible*. The feminist academic critical actor's persuasion work must be reactive and responsive as well as proactive. *En cours de route*—as Karen Celis (personal communication) would put it—they must be alert to prompt and exploit new opportunities, relationships, and networks, and be ready to counter expected or unforeseen contestation, resistance, and/or backlash.

In acting to bring about institutional change, the feminist academic critical actor is both an agent as well as an analyst. The two roles are concurrent rather than consecutive, even if at a later stage a more profound retrospective, critical self-reflection might also be produced. Put differently, as the feminist critical actor thinks on her feet in the here and now, they would do well to specify how they might act in a particular context, attentive to what response might be incited (whether supportive, agnostic, or critical), and to work out how they can best act, and with whom, to institute and instigate gender sensitizing outcomes. This is not simply that as an analyst, the feminist academic critical actor knows more, or differently, because of their new research; or even that they can deploy their new knowledge to devise technically appropriate and politically viable GSP

recommendations. Rather, and as I illustrate in the next section, the feminist academic critical actor's twin roles undergird the development of strategies and tactics that work with and around (i.e., meet, subvert, or negate) particular institutional actor's preferences and interests towards the goal of GSP reform.

3. The Feminist Academic Critical Actor's "Hard Labour"

As already indicated above concerning the House of Commons Commission, the aspirant feminist academic critical actor enters into a highly masculinized political arena when they access the Palace of Westminster, one historically established for, by, and in the interests of elite men (Lovenduski, 2005; Malley, 2011; Puwar, 2004). They can be under no illusion that their impactful labour will be hard (Mackay, 2020). My time in the House was most definitely experienced as physically exhausting but also demanding concerning intellectual deftness and personal fortitude. This might be true of any ethnographic study of the Commons—or indeed embedded research in other institutions—but it was exacerbated by the persuasion work I was tasked with undertaking as an aspirant feminist academic critical actor:

> As a woman and as a feminist, I would routinely face direct challenges from MPs in the form of the gendered questioning of my *authority* (you have no formal status in the House), *legitimacy* (you are but an academic), and *knowledge* (you only think you know how the House works and what it—MPs and staff—need)….I was told that I did not and could not know it [The House]….If I was not "of" the institution, nor was I "of" the people. I was biased with the wrong informants and friends. And if they were mistaken or wrong, then my critique could only be incorrect too. (Childs, 2024, emphasis added)

Authority, *legitimacy*, and *knowledge* are key terms. Precisely because their goal is to convince others of the relevance, salience, validity, and timeliness of her critique and prescription, the feminist academic critical actor's interventions need to be compelling to those who can implement change. Leaving aside, here, the question of how and on what basis, the feminist academic critical actor gains access, she will need thereafter to maintain acceptance of her presence (Fenno, 1978). Arguably more important still, they must be regarded as someone meriting listening to. The credibility of either (her) academic knowledge in general, or feminist academic knowledge in particular, cannot simply be assumed. As the above quote lays bare, I was frequently regarded as biased by my own or women MPs' (leftist) feminist blinkers, and/or under the political control of the Speaker, as well as too abstracted from the "realities" of the House. This was especially the case for Conservatives and particularly Conservative men MPs. At other times MPs also queried my right to speak "my truth" to them. Clerks and officials were in broad terms much more sympathetic to academic enquiry, perhaps because of my prior relationships with senior ones, who considered me "their feminist." That is not to say that clerks and officials were not reticent about my radicalism per se, nor how this might negatively affect the take-up of any of my more "considered," as they would put it, recommendations. There was an ongoing preference for TGP to include fewer recommendations.

To try to mediate indifferent and hostile reactions, I followed what is widely considered wise and accepted fieldwork practices, such as dressing appropriately for the organization and adopting its terms and ways of operating. In this, I voiced my longstanding, non-partisan, formal, and informal links to the House, tried to work with the norms of the House, and appealed to MPs' prejudices and individual and institutional egos. For example, I would talk of the UK Parliament as a global role model parliament, and stress the MPs' role in advancing this. I would also periodically present my "professorial knowledge" as distinct in form from, and of

lesser value in, understanding the everyday practices of the House. In respect of the former, I did this knowing that Westminster has much to learn from other places, and in respect of the latter, I did so knowing that I was risking others and not necessarily any less worrying responses and reactions. For example, cultivating "ethnographic naiveté" or deploying flattery (Atkinson, 2017, p. 105; Crewe, 2015) risks reproducing notions of women's lesser knowledge. Naiveté might, if interpreted as flirting, prompt inappropriate responses. And, in presenting myself as a "reasonable" feminist, I inadvertently implied a distinction between the good and bad feminist. Such a distinction might arguably feed a narrative that could subsequently be used to restrict the entry of the "less reasonable" feminist in the future, a state of affairs that I would not want to see. Here, then, are examples of the everyday, consequential "choices" that the feminist academic critical actor might face, which must be weighed against any more immediate benefits. Ultimately, she can and should be held accountable for "how" she acts.

The "what" of her institutional change agenda is essential too. With my access to the Commons informally secured via a senior Clerk of the House—I had longstanding relationships with senior clerks and was known to the then Speaker of the House, having been an official adviser to the 2010 Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation—it was to my university and funder whom I was formally accountable; neither had any interest in the nature of my recommendations, only that I was impactful. In developing my new plan for the House of Commons, I was committed to drafting only technically appropriate and politically viable recommendations; feminist institutionalism convinced me to rank the incremental over the fantastical. At the same time, and in productive tension, were what I considered non-negotiable, feminist red lines. One reading of *Designing and Building Feminist Institutions* is, accordingly, a defence of TGP's feminist content (Childs, 2024). In this, I acknowledge my gyroscopic tendencies (Mansbridge, 2003), even as I state my debts to (a) extant politics and gender research, (b) parliamentary research that addresses women's political representation, (c) the insights of my two Commons advisory groups—a parliamentarian one and a "clerks and officials" one—(d) input from the Parliament's workplace equality networks, not least Parligender, (e) a meeting with representatives from select women's/parliamentary civil society groups, and (f) my feminist in residence and secret clerk. All of these acted as sources of information, technical and political, as well as constituting sites of accountability. Practising feminist parliamentary ethnography—bringing politics and gender analysis to the research site and the data—I was moreover able to identify and develop stronger and new relationships, and opportunities that I could nurture, as well as better recognizing the actors and institutional constraints that needed to be overcome.

Over and above their capacity to persuade parliamentary actors to take up their recommendations, and maybe for that very reason, the feminist academic critical actor will almost certainly have to accept that her recommendations may end up at some distance from what other feminists seek, especially perhaps, those outside of the institution. She will need in such circumstances a compelling rationale that justifies her "take" on the parliament. To provide one example: It was because I felt an obligation to women in the House—and to women who might one day seek to enter parliament—that I withstood a senior man MP warning me off drafting an MPs' maternity leave recommendation. I was appalled that he considered that I would be creating a reputational "scandal" for the House by raising the issue, or that I would damage the arrangements individual women might be able to secure from their party managers, the Whips. He seemed to me more concerned about what consequences any bespoke baby leave would have for MPs who are ill than for the mother and to a lesser extent the father MP. Despite all that he said, I would not be deterred; my responsibilities to women MPs, pregnancy anti-discrimination activists, and women generally, was

paramount. Plus, I had acquired sufficient knowledge of women MPs' experiences to be sure of my critique and of what might be put in place to enable MPs to better balance early parenthood with their parliamentary work.

The idea of *the feminist art of the possible* alludes to the recognition that the feminist academic critical actor operates in less than hospitable habitats and faces political actors with oppositional preferences and privileged positions to protect. The critical MPs on the Commission had, therefore, been correct in perceiving that many GSP reforms would involve a rebalancing of gender power within the House, and do so at some cost of those currently, albeit unfairly, benefitting from the masculinized Commons. When it came to determining, and moving the levers of change, I frequently had to rely upon critical male allies—not least the Speaker himself, because of his institutional significance. Once again there are consequences to these choices, symbolic and substantive: for example, privileging powerful men as change actors may require a dilution of reform, and/or give rise to an over-emphasis on their agency, thereby downplaying women's actions prior to or alongside (Erikson, 2017, pp. 153–154; Mackay, 2021; Myerson & Scully, 1995).

As she seeks to persuade, the feminist academic critical actor should not be surprised if she is scarred by her experiences. Even a working relationship with institutionally privileged men may not protect them. Counteractions operate on a continuum of gendered political violence (Krook, 2020; Piscopo, 2016), negatively affecting some more than others, on the usual structural grounds, of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, (young) age, and caring responsibilities. My personal and professional privileges notwithstanding, on two occasions I was subject to tabloid copy, querying once again my authority and legitimacy, and with immediate and longer lasting affective effects. The hangover effects remained, reducing interaction with the media for fear of misrepresentation and reputational and/or social media backlash. For those contemplating becoming a feminist academic critical actor, and despite any academic riches associated with impactful research, as we enter the public realm in this (new) role, we are making ourselves present in prominent places, increasing the likelihood of being subject to an array of harms.

4. Conclusion

The character of the feminist academic critical actor emerged as I came to realize I could position myself to lead on institutional re-gendering in the UK House of Commons; by refracting through my feminist/academic specs my prior knowledge harvested from the collective works of politics and gender scholars (predominantly, political representation, parties and parliaments, and feminist institutionalist scholarship) and new ethnographically-grounded experiences acquired through observing and experiencing Westminster. In seeking to act critically, I would, over and above producing institutionally compatible G/DSP reforms, need to persuade many different political actors that my new design, *The Good Parliament*, should be adopted. I am unable to fully support my claim to constitute a feminist academic critical actor in this article—that involves a book-length treatment. It is also ultimately for others to determine. In *Designing and Building Feminist Institutions* (Childs, 2024), I systematically reconstruct the (extra)institutional contexts and conditions within which I acted, comprehensively document my re-gendering efforts, critically examine collaborations with other actors, internal and external to the House, and analyse what I did, and the gendered power struggles I negotiated (Celis & Lovenduski, 2018). I trust, however, that I have here provided sufficient to make a *prima facie* case for the feminist academic critical actor. It might be that other feminists undertaking impactful research in (political) institutions will, in what I have written, recognize their

labour as that of the feminist academic critical actor. If that is the case, then their self-reflective experiences will over time flesh out, if not revise, this understanding of the feminist academic critical actors' agential and analytic roles, prompting yet greater appreciation of when and how, and by whom, institutions can be ripened in a feminist direction.

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